

# Career and College Advice to the Forgotten Half: What do Counselors and Career and Technical Teachers Advise?

---

**Issue/Topic:** Counseling/Guidance; High School

**Author(s):** Krei, Melinda; Rosenbaum, James

**Organization(s):** Educational Research and Consulting; Northwestern University

**Publication:** Teachers College Record

**Published On:** 10/1/2001

---

## Background:

New school conditions and societal factors have influenced counselors' duties and attitudes. Many now appear to consider it proper to regard all students as "college material."

Students have begun to rely on Career and Technical teachers as sources of information, a role that has not been examined.

The information and advice provided by Career and Technical teachers and counselors may be especially critical for economically disadvantaged youth.

---

## Purpose:

To examine the career and college advice that high school counselors and Career and Technical teachers give to the "forgotten half," students who are unlikely to seek a four-year degree.

---

## Findings/Results:

Most of the counselors and teachers in the sample work in high schools that encourage them to push college attendance. Although both counselors and Career and Technical teachers tend to encourage college for students who show any interest, the two groups approach college and career advice in strikingly different ways. Career and Technical teachers offer a far more nuanced view of college, often providing students a much broader range of postsecondary choices.

### Guidance Counselors:

As a part of their regular duties, they typically advise students' college choices, help administer the application process, sometimes arrange for students to meet with visiting recruiters or go to visit colleges and occasionally urge colleges to admit certain students. There is no corresponding set of activities in place to assist students who are not planning to attend college. Neither schools nor society-at-large have defined what they should do to assist work-bound students.

- Because of their heavy caseloads, counselors in the sample often provided career information in large group settings; and, all too frequently, their appointments with individual students were brief and rushed.
- Only 22.5% listed preparation for work roles as a first or second priority for their guidance programs. However, placing a high priority on career and work roles is associated with an increase in time spent on preparation for careers after high school. In the complete sample, only 25% spend 30% or more of their time on career planning; but if they work in departments that give high priority to preparation for

work roles, 37% spend this much time on career planning.

- When they do talk with students about their plans after high school, postsecondary choices are most often framed as a decision between college and work. Few report that they advise students to consider alternative kinds of training, such as apprenticeships or technical schools.

### **Career and Technical Teachers:**

Unlike the majority of counselors, Career and Technical teachers offer a far more nuanced view of college, often providing students a much broader range of postsecondary choices. Career and Technical teachers seem to regard themselves as better qualified to advise about careers and further training than the counselors who work in their schools.

However, Career and Technical teachers are full of contradictions regarding college and career choice. Attitudes in the sample range from an almost pure "college-for-all" perspective to the stance that their students are already well prepared to enter the workforce and get well-paid entry level jobs with opportunities for advancement. Although the authors found no clear pattern of characteristics shared among teachers within any group, they noted that Career and Technical teachers fit into **four broad categories** in terms of their advice and opinions about college: (1) College-for-all, (2) Diplomats, (3) Straightforward and (4) Hands-off.

### **"Straightforward" (32 of 80 teachers)**

These teachers try to ensure that students have realistic information and believe it is their responsibility to offer advice about career issues.

- Found across the Career and Technical fields included in the study, but many work in Career and Technical schools.
- Tend to have current information about opportunities in their occupations and are more likely to maintain contacts with employers in their area. Consequently, they seem to be particularly confident about the information regarding career requirements that they can provide to students.
- Differ from diplomats in that they tend to provide career information as a regular part of their course work and build individual advising into their class time. When giving postsecondary advice, they present a range of options beyond four-year colleges.
- Express much less concern about hurting self-esteem or about repercussions from parents and administrators, at least in part, because they feel confident about their knowledge of their fields and their students' interests and capabilities.
- Tend to provide experiential, concrete kinds of information and activities that are meaningful to their students. In their classrooms, they often include college and career information as part of their regular curriculum.
- More successful in reaching students and helping them to grapple realistically with postsecondary choices. When asked if their students tend to have unrealistic college or career plans, they are less likely to respond that their students are unrealistic.
- Do not discourage college attendance.
- Tend to discuss options with individual students and to offer advice when needed. This group is not anxious to "burst bubbles." On the contrary, they believe they have

provided information to their students all along, as part of their regular curriculum.

**"Diplomats" (26 of 80 teachers)**

- Reluctant to tell students that their plans may not be feasible and that college may demand more than they are prepared to deliver. These teachers try to balance encouragement with realistic advice.
- Found across every field but concentrated in schools located in communities where more students are expected to be college bound. In blue-collar communities in which parents may see college attendance as a sign of upward mobility, teachers feel they must tread softly.
- In middle- and upper-middle-class suburbs, teachers are also careful in offering advice about alternatives to college because they believe the college-for-all attitude to be the norm in their communities. In an effort to deflect responsibility, these teachers may recommend that students talk to people they know outside of school to get more information.
- Feel some responsibility to help students make realistic plans after graduation, but they do not feel that they have enough authority to give unambiguous advice. Instead, they gently introduce students to the possibility that their plans may be unrealistic and that other options should be considered.

**"Hands-off" (13 of 80 teachers)**

- Stand out for the clarity of their message: College and career advice is not their job.
- Turn up everywhere in the sample, even in schools with a career and technical focus. Many tend to subscribe to the "school-of-hard-knocks model," believing that it is part of young people's development to make a number of false starts before finding an appropriate job or training opportunity. Some explain that they opt out of discussing plans because they lack the authority to offer such advice or that students won't listen anyway.
- Willing to provide some objective information in their classes but reluctant to offer any individual guidance. Some simply state that they do not deal with postsecondary issues at all.
- Like counselors, many have doubts they are serving students well by failing to provide clear career guidance and neglecting to explore the feasibility of students' plans.

**"College-for-all" (9 of 80 teachers)**

- Views correspond closely to those of most counselors who encourage everyone to go to college.
- Not confined to fields that are more likely to require college training or to high schools that might be expected to stress college attendance.
- Do not appear to distinguish among students regarding their interest in college work, career plans or academic ability.
- Many said college is not for everyone and good jobs in their fields do not necessarily require college training. However, later said they encourage all their students to at least try college.

- Some give a relatively clear rational for their college push. They often mention the competitive labor market and believe that somehow even a little exposure to college work will increase a job applicant's chances. Other reasons for stressing college attendance include increased maturity that comes with some time spent in college and increased skill levels.
- In a few cases, teachers say they push college attendance but give no explanation for its benefits. Others see college as a way to "test the field," as if taking college courses is the best way for young people to decide if they like the occupational area they studied in high school.

---

## Policy Implications/Recommendations:

- The college-for-all approach used by most counselors and a few Career and Technical teachers does not acknowledge the reality of the college dropout risks for these students.
- Career and Technical teachers and counselors need professional training to allow them to learn about job requirements, salary levels and advancement opportunities, information on apprenticeships, jobs that offer training and advancement, short-cycle occupational schools and certification programs, job-training opportunities and the like.
- School systems need to acknowledge "forgotten half" youths [non-college bound youth] and assist them in developing skills and finding careers.